

REPORT TO THE 43RD DISTRICT



STATE REP. FRANK CHOPP

WINTER 2004

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

Last year, the state legislature faced significant challenges – among which was the \$2.7 billion budget shortfall. That meant we had to work and fight hard to protect our values, our people and our quality of life. We prevailed in many important ways.

We passed prescription drug reform.

We passed a mercury reduction bill - one of the best in the nation.

We increased funding for low-income housing to historic levels.

We passed a transportation package - the most that has been done for transportation in close to 30 years.

We got results, but there's more to do.

I strongly advocated for the House version of the budget which would have better funded both school initiatives (I-728, reducing school class sizes and I-732, providing teacher salary COLAs), fully funded a contract for much needed pay raises and health care benefits for home care workers and made less drastic cuts in health care - for working families and children. Unfortunately, the final budget represented a different compromise with the Senate Republicans and the Governor.

As we enter the 2004 session, we can take steps to build a Washington that better funds our schools, provides a better safety net for the less fortunate, and better protects the environment.

We can establish the goal of giving every child in Washington state the opportunity for affordable health care by 2008, and take the first step by reducing the cost of premiums for thousands of low-income families around the state. We can pay home care workers a better wage and provide them with health insurance. We can pass mental health parity. And we can do more. I remain committed to this effort.

While it is an honor for me, as Speaker, to serve the entire state, it is a special honor to serve you as one of the representatives from the 43rd District.

Sincerely,

Frank Chopp

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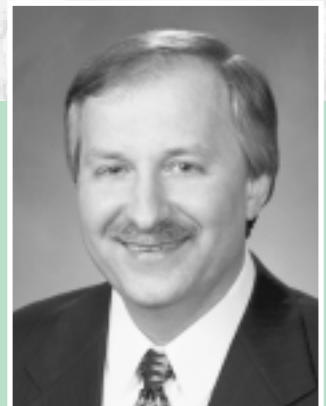
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GETTING RESULTS

■ PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

I am very proud of the historic prescription drug reforms we enacted. The bill we passed will:

- Adopt a preferred-drug list based on the best medical evidence.
- Provide bulk buying power, which means the state obtains volume discounts. These price discounts will be available to 590,000 seniors and people with disabilities who don't have prescription drug insurance.
- Allow doctors to prescribe the drug they believe is the very best one for their patients.
- Educate consumers and providers about the new prescription drug list.



■ BASIC NEEDS – HOUSING & FOOD

Despite the deficit, we did not cut support to food programs, and we increased funding for low-income and special needs housing. The state construction budget provides \$80 million - the most in our state's history - for low-income housing.

We were also proud to protect the GA-U program, a last-resort lifeline for people with disabilities. I have personally witnessed how GA-U has allowed struggling people to hold on and even get on a course to improve their lives.

With the nation focused on the affordability of health care, we must maintain the state's investment in helping people get health care coverage. While the Senate Republican proposed budget would have cut over 100,000 people off their health care plans or out of health services, we substantially reduced that impact – making a big difference for tens of thousands of people.

■ PROTECTING & SUSTAINING THE ENVIRONMENT

Reducing mercury. Far fewer Washington kids will be exposed to mercury poisoning than in the past, thanks to the passage of the Mercury Reduction and Education Act. The Act bans the sale of several products that contain mercury, including toys, auto switches, most old-fashioned thermometers and blood pressure cuffs, and thermostats.



Protecting our shores. A rescue tug is stationed at Neah Bay to help protect the waters of Puget Sound in the event of an oil spill. It will be safeguarding the Strait of Juan de Fuca in the winter months through 2008.

We also adopted and funded new shoreline protection rules that will retain ecological functions of shoreline habitats, including their ability to harbor salmon, curb erosion and halt flooding.

■ TRANSPORTATION

The Legislature approved the first new investment in transportation in 13 years which will generate 3,000 new construction jobs over the first 12 months and invest our transportation dollars in a specific list of the most-needed projects. The five-cent gas tax increase, increases in weight fees, and sales tax on the sales of motor vehicles will go to ferries, public transportation (buses, para-transit, commute trip reduction, vanpools and park & rides), and rail and highways.

Alaskan Way Viaduct. We approved \$177 million in funding as a down payment for the Alaskan Way Viaduct. This will complete the Environmental Impact Statement, purchase some right of way and provide for enough design work to move forward with a contract. Moving rapidly forward on the Alaskan Way Viaduct remains my top priority in transportation!

BACK TO BASICS

THE 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

In focusing on transportation, jobs and the economy, we made real progress. Now, we need to make this economy work for everyone in this state by creating good paying jobs with benefits, making health care more affordable and investing in education. We need to get back to the basics.

This session we will be working hard to make sure the economy works for everyone. We will take concrete steps to make health care more affordable, invest in education and create good paying jobs with benefits.

EDUCATION

I fought for better pay for teachers and more money for our schools, and I'm happy to say that our position in the House helped us negotiate a better budget with the Senate Republicans, who would have made even deeper cuts to health care and schools.

While the final budget is a lot better than the original proposals from the Governor and the Senate, it is not perfect. It is my intention to fight to do right by the will of the people when they passed the two initiatives on overcrowded classes and teacher pay. Quality education is only achieved through motivated and well trained teachers and students who are healthy and ready to learn.

I am very proud to be working with a citizens group that is taking on the issue of long-term and stable revenue to fund our public education system – early learning, K-12 and higher education. We must invest in our children and our future.

In addition to working for improved state funding for local schools I also support legislation to:

Improve the Learning Assistance Program to enable more low-income children achieve Washington's high academic standards. We can achieve this by expanding the program to high school students and reforming learning assistance funding to target resources where they're most needed.

Improve academic standards by making state graduation requirements focused and clear, and giving students who fall short of state standards additional opportunities to succeed and stay on track for graduation.



Help local school levy efforts by allow school levies to pass with a simple majority, as opposed to the current 60 percent. It is wrong, and hurtful to schools, to require school levies to meet election standards we do not apply to other public votes. And we should also make revisions to the levy base calculations that would bring many more financial resources in to our local schools.

WASHINGTON CARES

House Democrats have formed the Washington CARES Task Force (**C**ompassion, **A**ccountability, **R**eform, **E**conomic Security) to address the most basic and pressing needs of our people - children, working families, people with disabilities and seniors.

To help every student achieve high standards by 2008, let us set the goal of ensuring that every child can have affordable health care by 2008. We can make a significant start this year, by lowering the premiums for children's health insurance. This will not only make health care more affordable for families, it will make academic success more achievable for students.

We will also push mental health parity, further steps in caring for foster children, expanding services for people with mental health needs and disabilities, investing more in clinics and hospitals that provide basic safety net services and doing even more to create low-income housing and provide the subsequent services needed for homeless families.

JOBS

House Democrats are committed to improving the economy for all people. We must create good paying jobs with benefits, pay our low-wage workers better and get them health care, expand and nurture our small businesses and invest in the type of industry that will invest in this region, remain here and hire our workers.

We must pay our home care workers a better wage and make sure they have health care benefits and workers compensation. We can also pay our child care workers better. We can invest in our small businesses. And we can expand apprenticeship opportunities – one of the most cost effective ways the state invests in developing trade skills that will help future workers get good paying jobs with benefits.



MORE TO DO

■ UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

One of my biggest disappointments in the 2003 legislative session was the passage of an unemployment insurance bill that I strongly believe will have very detrimental effects on many folks who lose their jobs. I strongly opposed the bill that ultimately passed the Republican-controlled Senate and that was supported by the Governor. I believe that we must change this law to ensure that our working people are treated fairly and have the hard-earned safety net in hard times.

■ CIVIL RIGHTS

Although the Senate would not hear it, the House again passed the anti-discrimination bill that would have made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. This reasonable proposal would apply on the job, in banking, in hotels, and in real estate.



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